

WITHIN OUR REACH:

A Community Partnership To End Homelessness



Focus Groups: Final Recommendations

The primary purpose of the focus groups was to gather community input to help complete a 10-Year strategy to end homelessness. Specific goals included:

1. Identifying issues and problems related to homelessness;
2. Identifying solutions for preventing and ending homelessness; and
3. Making recommendations to the Working Group concerning solutions for preventing and ending homelessness.

Nine (9) focus group meetings were scheduled—one per city council district.

Each focus group lasted approximately two (2) hours. There were approximately 20 to 30 community representatives at each focus group.

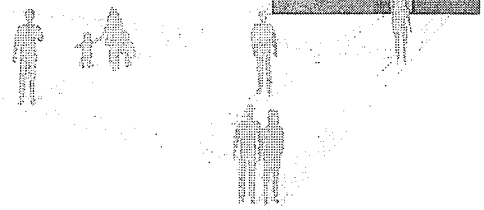
Recommendations from the focus groups to the Working Group have been grouped under the following needs: A) Homeless Prevention; B) Permanent Affordable Housing; C) Transitional Housing; D) Supportive Social Services; E) Street Outreach; F) Additional Funding; and G) Community Outreach and Education.

A. Homeless Prevention

1. Establish rent control;
2. Increase homeless prevention resources (e.g. rental assistance; utility assistance; free food);
3. Create an Eviction Protection Program;
4. Create a "security deposit trust fund;"
5. Support current fair housing legislation regarding state eviction process;
6. Promote state legislation to address possible loss of benefits income once someone becomes stably housed;
7. Identify early indicators/early diagnosis of homeless situations and create a public information piece on "Early Indicators for People At-Risk to Homelessness";
8. Legislative advocacy promoting homeless prevention as a higher priority for federal dollars;
9. Coordinate better with DCFS to track and prepare foster youth for emancipation;

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10. Foster care system should put money into savings accounts while youth are in the system;
11. Train all social service providers in eviction prevention strategies;
12. Look at culturally successful strategies to prevent/address homelessness within different ethnic communities;
13. Better/more structured coordination within community social service system;
14. Develop communication strategy to let persons at-risk of becoming homeless and those who want to help them know about what to do to prevent homelessness;
15. Create an inventory of available resources to prevent homelessness;
16. Increase the number of persons at-risk of becoming homeless receiving mainstream resources (e.g., public assistance);
17. Develop and implement a discharge planning policy and centralized resources;
18. Develop a "just-cause eviction" ordinance;
19. Create a centralized homeless prevention program;
20. Advocate for a living wage ordinance in Long Beach;
21. Advocate for Universal Health Care (nationally);
22. Provide City-sponsored or coordinated health insurance program;
23. Provide interest-free debt assistance programs;
24. Establish coordinated assistance programs (between agencies & service providers) to assist people at-risk or in financial crisis;
25. Establish Good Neighbor Groups;
26. Provide more community education/life skills training on renting and housing responsibility;
27. Establish a drop-in center for coordinated information/assistance (Neighborhood Resource Center);
28. Conduct "Are You At Risk" Workshops sponsored by neighborhood groups, employers and others;
29. Utilize Neighborhood Service Center as central information/resource for homeless issue (with additional funding); replicate NSC in other neighborhoods;
30. Create a system for community members/groups to Sponsor/Mentor Homeless individuals and families;
31. Present homeless individuals/families in need at weekly City Council meetings to solicit community assistance/sponsorships (similar to what is currently done with homeless dogs and cats);
32. Extend rental eviction process to 90 days for individuals that agree participate in support programs to help address their issues; create incentives for landlords to participate;

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33. Provide funding to assist people with relocating to new housing/job opportunities.

B. Permanent Affordable Housing

1. Increase permanent supportive housing (including single-room occupancy) stock for homeless persons with permanent disabilities;
2. Provide tax credit incentives to encourage apartment owners to rent to homeless persons;
3. Create city-sponsored "roommate service;"
4. Apply for county and state funding to supplement loss in Section 8 dollars;
5. Create opportunities to supplement rent with skilled labor and/or other services (sweat equity/bartering);
6. More support for Habitat for Humanity and other sweat equity programs;
7. Move emancipated youth into subsidized "student housing" tied to education programs;
8. Provide tents for persons;
9. Establish inclusionary zoning ordinance;
10. Create more safe havens; replicate "The Village" model and scattered-site model;
11. Create scattered-site subsidized housing opportunities tied to supportive services;
12. Rehab existing structures (i.e. motels) to create more efficiency units;
13. Legislate zoning/land use changes to remove barriers and support creation of more efficiency units, SROs and other housing opportunities for the homeless;
14. Convert existing housing and motels into SRO housing;
15. Develop incentives for developers to create affordable housing;
16. Change attitudes toward density and create more affordable housing by building upward;
17. Create more mixed-use housing (business & housing);
18. Create more mixed income and intergenerational housing complexes;
19. Create government sponsored homeownership program for service employees (teachers, law enforcement, etc.);
20. Employ an eminent domain strategy;
21. Utilize Aqua Towers (presently vacant?);
22. Solicit/provide incentives for apartment owners to contribute unit(s) to "Housing First" program;
23. Provide affordable housing opportunities for people that work in Long Beach.

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C. Transitional Housing

1. Provide transitional housing and supportive services for emancipated foster youth;
2. Create a Safe Haven model for people with chronic substance abuse issues.

D. Supportive Social Services (emergency needs, service needs, income needs)

• Emergency Needs

1. Expand shower facilities;
2. Establish weekend drop-in centers;
3. Establish a drop-in center for information and assistance (Neighborhood Resource Center);
4. Establish a toll-free phone number/hotline for emergency assistance/information.

• Service Needs

1. Provide affordable childcare services;
2. Expand mental health services;
3. Expand substance abuse treatment services;
4. Make available more free health care services;
5. Engage families of homeless individuals in addressing the needs of their loved ones (education, information, access to resources, etc.);
6. Establish an "adopt a homeless person or family" program;
7. Provide life skills training in public schools to help prevent people from becoming homeless;
8. Provide up-front counseling and support groups for transitionally homeless individuals/families;
9. Establish a mentoring program to work with homeless individuals/families;
10. Better/more structured coordination within community social service system;
11. Create more good paying (living wage) jobs; (move to income needs);
12. Provide more assistance to people seeking work (clothes, transportation, child care, etc.);
13. Create additional primary schools for homeless children;
14. Focus on services for the dually diagnosed (substance abuse and mental illness);

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15. Create an inventory of available supportive services for persons who are presently homeless;
16. Provide money management training programs;
17. Establish a coordinate case management computer network;
18. Establish a "Project Connect" type of program; replicate the Long Beach Connections event (community-driven);
19. Establish a centralized service location (or expand multi-service center);
20. More funding for county mental health workers to follow-up with people discharged from institutions to help ensure they remain housed;
21. Establish a centralized location for homeless people to receive mail, phone calls, computer access, etc.

• Income Needs

1. Improve access to public assistance;
2. Increase employment training and placement programs/opportunities (include life skills training);
3. Create subsidized transportation options to assist working individuals;
4. Create transitional programs to assist people moving from benefits assistance to employment income;
5. Teach/promote personal responsibility/accountability/self-sufficiency as part of all service activities – tie all public assistance to personal responsibility;
6. Increase the number of homeless persons receiving mainstream resources (e.g., public assistance).

E. Street Outreach

1. Expand homeless outreach services/resources.

F. Additional Funding

1. Create a Housing Trust Fund with funding focused on homeless housing needs;
2. Set up a fund to help housing with substandard disability access become ADA compliant;
3. Identify and take advantage of all new funding resources (federal, state, local, private) for development of permanent supportive housing units;
4. Utilize Redevelopment Agency resources to create permanent supportive housing and ensure that Human Services staff is involved in the planning.

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G. Community Outreach and Education

1. Ensure a regional approach to homeless issues;
2. Increase community education concerning homelessness;
3. Improve community education concerning resources available for homeless persons;
4. Engage Apartment Owners Association in 10-Year Plan process;
5. Ensure that 10-year Homeless Plan is coordinated with the Housing Action Plan, Workforce Development Strategy and other relevant plans;
6. Engage the inter-faith community organizations more actively in the 10-Year Plan process;
7. Establish "Best Practices Standards" of providing community services in Long Beach;
8. Provide education/support systems for families of mentally ill homeless individuals;
9. Legislate zoning/land use changes to remove barriers and support creation of more efficiency units and other housing opportunities for the homeless;
10. Get Mayor/City Council to endorse "Housing First" model;
11. Advocate for federal/state legislation mandating subsidized housing opportunities;
12. Engage state government representatives in 10-Year Planning process;
13. Establish a community newsletter promoting homeless issues/solutions;
14. Hold a parade/conduct a door-to-door campaign to highlight the issue of homelessness in Long Beach;
15. Provide opportunities for persons at-risk of becoming homeless to express their needs;
16. Advocate for public benefit increases;
17. Advertise community assistance and resource information through utility bill statements, buses, bus benches, billboards, etc;
18. Communicate/coordinate homeless strategies with other nearby communities;
19. Keep homeless issues on the agenda for the "powers that be";
20. Make homeless issues a platform item in the Mayor's race;
21. Engage business community in 10-year strategy process (take advantage of business know how/can do attitude to make things happen;
22. Promote more community contributions to homeless solutions;
23. Establish a "start here" point for homeless information/assistance;
24. Provide training for community members that want to help with homeless issues.

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**Working Group Notes
for September 28, 2005 Meeting**

Opening remarks were made by Kevin Cwayna, Co-Chair of the working group.

- Pace of project – Timeline available online. Aware the process seems to be moving slowly, however, focus groups are collecting information for the subcommittees. Once subcommittees meet, the pace of the process will pick up.
- Conflict of Interest – Committee members have expressed their fear of a personal conflict of interest. Most members on committee are present because of their affiliation with organizations that are concerned with homelessness. We are making recommendations, not final decisions, but if any individual is uncomfortable they are free to abstain from any voting process. We would appreciate continued input in the subcommittees and Working group forum.
- Level of trust required – In order for this process to succeed a level of trust must exist. We must all agree to work for the common good.

Self Introductions by attendees followed.

Power Point presentation entitled "The Face of Homelessness" was presented by Susan Price. Power Point is available on-line at http://www.longbeach.gov/health/organization/hss/homeless_services/10_year_plan_to_end_homeless.asp

Panel Discussion led by Susan Price City of Long Beach Homeless Services Coordinator. Panel was comprised of formerly homeless and currently homeless individuals.

Robert H. – Homeless single father

Maria – Single mother was homeless for 18 months

Robert W. – Single was homeless 5 years now lives in Safe Haven

Paul – Single and currently homeless (4 years)

Panel discusses personal reasons for becoming homeless and services that were useful while homeless

Joe Colletti from IURD presented the information that has been gathered from the Community meetings in Districts 3, 1, and 9. The following suggestions were presented

- Ensure a regional approach
- Increase permanent supportive housing
- Create Housing Trust Fund
- Provide affordable child care services
- Expand Mental Health Services

- Expand substance abuse services
- Establish Rent Control
- Increase Homeless Prevention Resources
- Provide tax credit to landlords that rent to the homeless
- Make available free health care services
- Encourage families to reunite with members that are homeless
- Improve community education on Homelessness
- Create city sponsored roommate service
- Set aside funds to help apartment owners that have substandard disabled access become compliant
- Create eviction prevention program
- Provide housing and supportive services for emancipated foster youth
- Establish weekend drop-in centers
- Establish an adopt a homeless program
- Create a security deposit trust fund
- Improve access to public assistance

The remaining six council districts will have community meetings in October and November.

Joe Colletti then led an open discussion of the panel participant's comments. The working group comments included

- Explore issues of recycling, homeless court system, and community service issues
- Explore the lack of services directed toward single men, as well as a general lack of homeless services
- Explore PATH as a possible example

Corinne Schneider. Department of Health and Human Services went over the next steps and gave an up date of the subcommittees

- Provided list of Chairs and Co-chairs
- Calendar of subcommittee meeting dates and times will be developed at the end of October or early November
- Subcommittee info. will be posted online

Question session followed, this was led by Kevin Cwayna

- Where would children coming from foster care obtain GED? - MSC collaboration has members that specialize in homeless youth services. A GED component is available however; the homeless youth population is the hardest to serve.
- Could interns come from the Life Skills course at the MSC? HHS will work with the MSC Coordinator to see if this is possible.
- When will group have a chance to see 10-year plans from other communities? Subcommittee has been set up specifically for this purpose. Information is available at www.neah.org
- Do other 10-year plans focus on groups of homeless other than the chronic homeless? Yes, there are a few 10-year plans that focus on other homeless populations however most focus on the chronic homeless.

- Will any group look at the criminalization of the homeless? Yes, each subgroup will examine specific topics of the homeless including criminalization of the homeless.
- Will money be available to support plan as presented? Part of the plan is to provide monetary sources to fund suggestions as well as looking at available federal monies to support the 10-year strategy.

Closing Remarks by Kevin Cwayna.

Meeting Adjourned